

Connecting Peace Corps Volunteers to Educators for Global Education

Maureen Wilson-Jarrard, Project Director

April 15, 2000

Purpose/Goals of the Project

Our team brings together Peace Corps World Wise Schools (WWS) educators, Peace Corps Fellows educators, currently-serving and returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs), and other educators who are involved in developing and using new teaching resources that will expand the knowledge of educators and students about the lives of people in the countries in Africa where Peace Corps Volunteers (PCVs) serve.

Description of the Project

The Peace Corps' "Connecting Peace Corps Volunteers to Educators" has assembled a team of teachers and returned volunteers to develop new standards based learning units about how water is used in daily life in the countries of Africa. Stories and photos are being collected from currently serving Volunteers in Peace Corps' host countries in Africa. These original source documents will be shared on a web site dedicated to the project. An on-line forum serves as the electronic meeting space for the development team.

Goals for the Second Quarter

Our goals for the second quarter were to:

- Raise funds/pursue collaborations
- Create a team
- Collect vignettes from Volunteers in Peace Corps countries in Africa
- Develop learning units
- Establish a web community among the team members
- Monitor and evaluate effectiveness

Accomplishments to Date

- *Raise funds/pursue collaborations*

During the third quarter we initiated two possible contacts for collaboration. The Peace Corps Office of Private Sector Cooperation and International Volunteerism assisted the team with an inquiry to Time Warner Inc. about the use of a piece of music put out on the Warner Brothers label. The music would be used as a theme to the "Water in Africa" web site. The second contact was to the Pew Charitable Trusts who were sent information about the project. Unfortunately, there have been no further communications from either of these contacts.

- *Create a team*

Objective: Hold an inservice for teachers to share ideas and concerns and provide information about water projects in Africa.

A major accomplishment of this quarter was the second meeting of the teachers involved in the project. The two and a half day inservice was held on the Presidents' Day weekend at Peace Corps Headquarters in Washington DC, beginning Thursday evening, February 17, and running through Saturday, February 19. The [agenda](#), written using the learning unit template that we expect the teachers to use, was centered on these three essential questions:

- How can we help each other?
- How can we write units usable to a wide audience?
- How can we use backward design to create exciting learning units based on the Water in Africa resources?

The goals of the inservice were to give the participants an opportunity to share their work, give feedback to other teachers, to create a list of new ideas for learning units, and begin to write another learning unit. By the end of the inservice the participants had renewed their bonds as a team, had some excellent [ideas](#) for new standards based lessons, had a better understanding of a backward design process, and had feedback on the unit they were beginning to create. In addition, two returned Volunteers who worked in water sanitation in several countries in Africa delivered a presentation about water sanitation equipment and their use within several African cultures.

The threaded discussion that has been used consistently as part of this project was used during the workshop to share reflections about what had occurred during the inservice. A middle school teacher on the team wrote:

We have all learned much from each other and from working through little glitches. Thank you for building in the teacher collaboration time, Maureen. Thank you all for your constructive comments and for listening Maureen, Carly, Amy, Bob, David, and Dany. It is very helpful to have a vision of what everyone else is doing and where we are headed. I have a feeling that we will be able to work more efficiently and effectively from now on. So, even though we have mucho more to do, I believe we are primed for it now and the results will be awesome!

An elementary school teacher (not at the inservice) reviewed the reflections about the inservice and wrote:

Just wanted to add a comment about tools, this Caucus tool is terrific...the technology that connects! Thanks everyone for sharing what's been happening these few days.

- *Collect vignettes from Volunteers in Peace Corps countries in Africa*

Objective: Continue to collect, log, review, and edit vignettes and photos.

By the end of the third quarter, 87 completed WET kits had been returned to WWS, 10 more than at the end of the second quarter, and 35% of the total. The anecdotes and captions from 10 of the 24 countries that submitted WET kits were transcribed, edited, and proofread, and photos were chosen from the film from each of these countries. These resources were posted on the working web site (www.wws.pair.com) so the teachers could continue to include them in their learning units.

Objective: Continue to advertise the project in Peace Corps countries in Africa.

The Peace Corps Director, Mark Schneider, was given a briefing on the project in February, soon after his appointment to Peace Corps. The briefing preceded his trip to Africa where he met with all the Africa Country Directors at a regional meeting.

Staff members from several posts in Africa were present in Washington for training during the third quarter. The project was explained to each of these people personally, and they were shown the working web site with the photos and anecdotes submitted in WET kits from Africa.

Objective: Develop a mailing to send to returned Volunteers through RPCV Country of Service Groups.

This objective was not met during the third quarter.

Objective: Begin to collect, log, review, and edit vignettes from RPCVs.

This objective was not met during the third quarter.

- *Develop learning units*

Objective: Continue to develop, review, and test learning units.

Thirteen learning units were submitted for review at Peace Corps by the end of the third quarter. Seven of them have been pilot tested in the writer's classroom, and two of them have been additionally tested in other classrooms. The majority of the learning units were submitted after the Winter Inservice. The teachers seemed to have a much greater understanding of the task before them, were more motivated to work on the material, and felt a sense of urgency to complete everything before the end of the school

year. Few of these units have been reviewed at Peace Corps because of the need to concentrate on preparing the resources from Africa. The units will be reviewed and revised during the fourth quarter.

Objective: Combine resources with World Wise Schools to look for a contractor to complete a graphic design for the project.

By the end of the third quarter a [statement of work](#) had been written for a graphic designer to provide us with an appropriate design for the home page and five secondary pages, and the RFQ had been sent to six design firms. Our plan is to have the site designed and begin to use it on the working web site by June 1 so the teacher members can give us feedback about it. WWS will contribute up to \$2000. For the design, and the grant funds will cover the remaining cost.

- *Establish a web community among the team members*

Our web community is becoming well established through our continued emphasis on the threaded discussion items on Caucus (<http://www.tmn.com>). Discussions about the three professional development videos that we have been circulating have been very interesting to follow. The items that discuss the teachers' reflections about pilot testing their own units are fascinating and heart-warming. It is very obvious that the teachers are growing professionally and are sharing and supporting each other in their work. As the learning units are reviewed and revised at Peace Corps, they will be added to the site.

We continue to rely on our password protected working web site (<http://www.wws.pair.com>; login is africa, password is water) to bring the resources from Africa to the teachers. We have added a section of maps and a help section about how to use the images in the classroom.

Monitor and evaluate effectiveness

Objective: Continue to use the established web community on Caucus to discuss concerns and post reflections on the project.

The teachers were asked to reflect on the Winter Inservice at two points during the two and a half days using the threaded discussion tool, Caucus. The final evaluation asked them to reflect on the essential questions the inservice posed.

A middle school teacher wrote:

As I said yesterday, a strength of this in-service has been the opportunity to really try to put backward design into practice. I am learning, however, that starting with an enduring understanding/essential question and a final product, is a fluid process...

We have certainly helped each other---technically, philosophically, and practically.

I don't think we directly confronted the question about the wide audience, but David and Carly's stories about their students were vivid enough to give me a sense of what classrooms can be like on a daily basis in places very different from the suburb where I have done most of my teaching.

Expenses in the Second Quarter

Forty percent of the grant (\$19,941.14) was spent by the end of the third quarter. Of this amount, 82% was spent on the educators, and 18% was spent on necessary supplies. One third of the total amount spent has been to bring the teachers together for inservice. Details of all expenditures are itemized on the [expense spreadsheet one](#) and [expense spreadsheet two](#).

Goals/Objectives for the Next Quarter

Our goals for the final quarter remain much the same, but our objectives are changing to reflect the progress of the project:

Raise funds/pursue collaborations

- Follow-up with the Office of Private Sector Cooperation and International Volunteerism

Create a team

- Find additional help (intern or paid teacher) to assist in the final months of the project.

Collect vignettes from Volunteers in Peace Corps countries in Africa

- Continue to advertise the project in Peace Corps countries in Africa and to collect, log, review, and edit vignettes and photos.
- Develop a mailing to send to returned Volunteers through RPCV Country of Service Groups.
- Begin to collect, log, review, and edit vignettes from RPCVs.

Develop learning units

- Continue to develop, review, and test learning units.
- Conduct a review of the learning units at Peace Corps and assist teachers in revising them as necessary.

Establish a web community among the team members

- Continue to use the established web community on Caucus to discuss concerns and post reflections on the project.

Monitor and evaluate effectiveness

- Solicit teacher reaction to the web design and navigability and revise as necessary.

Create a Water in Africa web site

- Complete the graphic design of the final web site and activate it on the working web site.
- Work with the WWS Marketing Specialist to prepare for a September launch of the Water in Africa learning module.
- Contact GEM to find out how to discuss the procedure to get the Water in Africa Project included in that gateway.

Other

- Cull all files on the project and create a concise record of the project for WWS.
- Insure that all the film collected from countries of Africa are placed in the Peace Corps photo archives.

Good News and Pleasant Surprises

The Winter Inservice proved to be the boost that the teachers needed to renew their interest in the project. By the final day, they were very enthusiastic and ready to explore the issues brought forth in the vignettes and photos from Africa.

The WWS Education Technology Specialist dealing with the technical aspects of the web site designed a method to generate the web pages for the project using a database. This has been extremely helpful in posting the photos and vignettes in a more efficient manner.

Particular Challenges, Difficulties, Needs

During the third quarter two of the teachers dropped out of the project. Because they did so prior to the Winter Inservice, their replacements, former teacher alternates, were able to participate in the inservice and get a good start on their work.

The work-study student that was working with the team left just before the end of the third quarter. This extra help will be sorely missed. It is uncertain whether this part-time assistance will be replaced.

The most time consuming task in the development of this learning module is working with photos that came from overseas. The greatest need was for someone skilled in manipulating photo images.

Early Lessons That Seem To Be Emerging From Our Team's Work

The lessons we learned continue to be:

- The coordination and direction of this project is taking nearly all Project Director's working hours.
- The model that we created for this project seems flawed in that the Project Director is the bottleneck upon which completion of all parts of the project depend.
- The resources collected from Africa and the learning units that are developed will become a major offering of World Wise Schools' web site.
- More than electronic contact is necessary to create a real team. The Winter Inservice was very important in validating the success of the educators working on the project. The more discussion and feedback among the educators, the better the learning units, and the greater their professional development.